The imperial origins of social and political thought

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Imperial Origins of Social and Political Thought[1]

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Abstract

The attempt to recover the international origins of social and political thought is motivated by the unsatisfactory fragmentation of modern knowledge - by its failure to account for the intimate connections between theory and history in general and its international dimension in particular - and seeks to overcome these divides. This article provides an analysis of the theory/history divide and its role for the fragmentation of modern knowledge. Theoretically, it shows, this divide is rooted in, and reproduced by, the epistemic foundations of modern knowledge. Historically, the modern episteme arises from a crisis of imperial politics in the 18th century. This analysis suggests that theory, history, and the international are products rather than origins of modern social and political thought. These historical origins thus do not provide the basis for more integrated forms of knowledge. They do, however, reveal that and how the fragmentation of knowledge itself simultaneously serves and obscures the imperialist dimension of modern politics.

Keywords: history, theory, international relations, episteme, empire

Introduction

The project of recovering the international origins of social and political thought is motivated by the glaring disjuncture between the everyday experience of intimate connections between theory and history, domestic and international politics on the one hand and their separation in scientific knowlege production on the other. Bridging these gaps thus promises 'better' knowledge: theories that are rooted in and sensitive to the historical context; histories conscious of their theoretical assumptions; 'theory-practice as a single field'; and international relations as an integral dimension of theory *and* history (Barkawi and Lawson, 2016). Such knowledge, in turn, is expected to provide the basis for 'better' political practice. A return of universal history, for

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example, is expected to generate 'a sense of human solidarity or global citizenship' (Christian, 2010, pp. 25-6, 7-8, 19).

Yet, fragmentation does not just affect the relations between history, theory, and the international. It has long been identified as a problem of the modern sciences in general and social and political thought in particular - leading to almost ubiquitous demands for interdisciplinarity and inspiring the development of new fields, or approaches, like historical sociology, political economy, biochemistry, or universal history that aim to bridge the gap between neighbouring fields or even between the humanities and the natural sciences at large (Christian, 2010, p. 24). Such projects are often successful in institutionalizing new fields of study, but they do not satisfactorily resolve the problem of fragmentation. Despite its rich contributions to our understanding of the modern world, historical sociology, for example, failed to convince mainstream sociology of the need for a historical approach; is criticized by historians for not meeting the methodological requirements of history; is itself internally fragmented; and has a history of excluding relevant dimensions of social and political life - such as culture or race (Adams, Clemens and Orloff, 2005, pp. 10-1, 25-7, 30, 32). This fate is by no means specific to historical sociology but rather characteristic of attempts to cross disciplinary divides - and it thus calls for a general analysis of the dynamics of fragmentation in the modern sciences. This article provides such an analysis, focusing on the example of History and International Relations (IR).[2]

I will begin by analyzing previous attempts to bridge the gap between history and (international) theory - which fall into two broad strategies. The first seeks to build on common features of these disciplines. It tends to fail because it overlooks that the separation is embodied in their very constitution. Consequently, the second strategy seeks to reconceptualize history and/or theory but fails to take into account the necessary historical context.

Responding to these lacunae, the second section provides a theoretical account of the constitution of modern disciplines in general, and History and IR in particular.

[2] I will distinguish the academic discipline of History with capital letters from history in the sense of the past. IR denotes the academic discipline studying international relations/politics.

Following Foucault's archeological approach, I argue that the fragmentation of knowledge has its roots in the modern episteme. Reconstructing the nature and dynamics of the modern episteme explains why systematic attempts to overcome disciplinary divisions simply tend to reproduce fragmentation.

The third section locates the historical origins of this modern episteme in the 'age of revolutions'. It shows that politics at the time was characterized by empires - and that the modern episteme and its distinction between theory and history, domestic and international politics, is a response to, rather than the root of, a political crisis of empire. On the one hand, therefore, historical analysis cannot lead back to a time when the international and domestic, historical and theoretical, dimensions of politics were integrated - and could therefore provide the basis for less fragmented forms of knowledge today. On the other hand, this historical analysis draws attention to the fact that epistemic and disciplinary fragmentation provided a 'solution' to the crisis of imperial politics. It thus highlights that the distinction between theory and history, domestic and international politics today serves the continuation of imperialist power politics precisely by obscuring them.

In conclusion, this article suggests that bridging the gap between history and (international) theory is bound to fail: theoretically, because each of these fields is constituted through the separation from the other, and historically because their origins lie in imperial rather than international politics - a distinction I will discuss in depth in section three. However, the analysis of these theoretical dynamics and historical origins of the fragmentation of modern knowledge does reveal its performative role in making the reproduction of imperialist policies possible. If not overcoming the fragmentation of modern knowledge as such, therefore, this analysis nevertheless opens up particular functions of this fragmentation to critique.

Bridging the gap between History and IR

The fragmentation of modern knowledge is seen as a problem both in History and in International Relations. Historians and IR scholars have thus explored the possibilities of bridging the gap between the two disciplines. Broadly two different strategies, I will show, characterize these efforts - but both tend to fail. Analyzing these strategies,

I will argue that both miss a crucial dimension - theoretical in one case and historical in the other - of the root of the problem.

In many ways, History and IR are inextricably linked (Walker, 1989; Jenkins, 1991, p. 5; Smith, 1999, pp. 8, 1; Isacoff, 2002, p. 603). History and the social sciences, including IR, emerged from a common discourse in the 19th century (Sewell, 2005, p. 2). Early IR scholars were often trained as historians and/or approached the problematique of international politics through historical investigations. Despite particularly behaviorist challenges, historical approaches were never entirely replaced in IR. And since the end of the Cold War, there has been renewed interest in historical approaches and even the suggestion of a 'historical turn' in the discipline (Vaughan-Williams, 2005, p. 116; Teschke, 2003, pp. 1-2; Bell, 2001; Hobden, 2002, p. 56; Lawson, 2012).

Furthermore, IR cannot escape history in the sense of 'the past' or 'past events'. Its subject matter, international politics, consists itself of historical events and the data used to substantiate even the most ahistorical and abstract IR theory are 'historical facts'. Conversely, historians regularly use social science concepts, categories, metaphors and theories - not only explicitly, as in the case of the Annales school, but as a matter of course (Sewell, 2005, pp. 1-2, 5; Wright, 2008, p. 114; Revel, 2008, pp. 397-8).

Despite this intimate connection, however, the constitution of separate academic disciplines 'utterly transformed the Edenic intellectual landscape' (Sewell, 2005, p. 2). While the differences between these disciplines are not absolute or exclusive (Smith, 1999, p. 9), they are real enough and widely recognized: historians aim to explain particular events (the idiographic approach) while IR scholars (and other social scientists) search for general laws (the nomothetic approach); historians adopt a chronological concept of causation while ahistorical concepts of causation dominate in IR; historians focus on agency while IR scholars are interested in structure and unintended consequences; historians highlight the moral choices of particular actors while IR scholars are interested in the nature of things; and historians tend to integrate their theoretical assumptions into historical narratives while IR scholars separate theoretical and empirical material (Sewell, 2005, pp. 3, 6, 9, 10; Smith, 1999, pp. 23-

5; Elman and Elman, 2001, pp. 12-23, 25-27; Lawson, 2012, p. 204; Christian, 2010, p. 20; Steinmetz, 2008, pp. 536-7).

These distinctions are widely seen as affecting the quality of work in both disciplines. Thus, while historians borrow theoretical concepts form social scientists and even change or develop these concepts further in light of their historical expertise, they rarely engage in theoretical debates (Sewell, 2005, pp. 4-5). This entails the danger, first, of leaving theoretical assumptions embedded in the concepts imported from other disciplines unexamined (Revel, 2008, pp. 398, 402, 403). Second, historians are likely to overlook structures and processes beyond particular historical cases (Lawson, 2012, p. 205; Lebow, 2001, p. 112). The absence of theoretical debate, third, means that historians often fail to feed their own theoretical insights back to social scientists (Sewell, 2005, p. 5).

IR scholars, meanwhile, tend to treat the output of historians as a trove of facts and data, of empirical material that provides building blocks for the construction of theories or evidence substantiating them (Smith, 1999, p. 1; Elman and Elman, 2001, p. 36). Hence, they overlook that historical material is itself only the highly contested product of the narratives that individual historians have created around 'traces of the past' usually in response to particular problems in the present and against similar narratives developed by other historians (Jenkins, 1991; Lawson, 2012, p. 205). In other words, by treating 'ambiguous historical evidence unambiguously' (Smith, 1999, p. 11) IR theories based on such material resemble castles built on sand.

In short, while history and theory are always co-implicated, either time or structure tends to be hegemonic (Walker, 1989, p. 168) and this imbalance undermines the quality of their respective output. Scholars on both sides of the divide thus argue that 'a deeper theoretical engagement ... could be mutually enlightening', that structure and historical conceptions of temporality need to be combined, that each discipline would better be able to achieve its own goals if it learned from the other (Sewell, 2005, pp. 1, 15; Levy, 2001, p. 82; Puchala, 2003; Steinmetz, 2008, p. 549).

In pursuit of this goal, two main approaches can be identified. The first consists in building on common interests, assumptions and methods. This narrows the potential

for cooperation down to IR scholars with qualitative, interpretive, or case study approaches (since the core assumptions of mainstream social scientists are incompatible with those of historians) and traditional historians interested in diplomatic or military affairs (Elman and Elman, 2001, p. 1; Sewell, 2005, p. 13). Establishing cooperation on such shared grounds, moreover, implies that the differences of method, sensibility and aesthetics between History and IR (or social science more generally) are in fact of 'secondary' importance while common assumptions, methods or concerns provide 'shared ground' (Lawson, 2012, p. 221). Such commonalities include attention to context - both textual and socio-political - and hence also a limitation of the truth claims of either discipline (Lawson, 2012, p. 216). Both historians and case studies researchers in IR use 'process tracing' which is based on the assumption that events always have a synchronic and diachronic dimension and thus '*historical* events enable *social* formations to emerge, reproduce, transform and, potentially, break down' (Lawson, 2012, p. 217; Bennett and George, 2001, pp. 137, 145). Further, narrative emplotment is used as a method of establishing order, meaning and explanation in history and the social sciences (Lawson, 2012, p. 219). Finally, the use of ideal types or typological theory - simplified maps of historical reality - is found in both disciplines and promises a sensitivity to historical particularity and complexity as well as a commitment to systematic inquiry (Lawson, 2012, p. 220; Bennett and George, 2001, pp. 138, 157). One strategy of addressing the gap between theory and history thus lies in building on such shared assumptions and practices.

And yet, scholars in both disciplines have long adopted such common strategies without producing a body of work that successfully transcends the division. Even projects that explicitly aim to bridge the gap by building on such common practices ultimately fail (Elman and Elman, 2001, p. 1). While historians, for example, use process tracing in order to explain particular cases, IR scholars tend to use it to develop and test generalizable theories (Bennett and George, 2001, p. 145). This suggests that the separation between history and theory is not 'secondary' but fundamental. Hence, scholars argue that the separation itself is fruitful, indeed constitutive, of their disciplines. It is 'essential for our work that historians remain experts on particular historical eras, events, or regions' because only then will there be 'historical case studies to draw upon and historical experts to critique our work'

(Bennett and George, 2001, pp. 165-6). In other words, the very possibility of IR scholarship depends upon the existence of *historical* expertise and vice versa. Identifying common ground is ultimately a tool for 'tacking' more effectively between the separate disciplines of IR and History (Lawson, 2012, p. 206) rather than for merging them. The fate of these projects suggests, then, that shared assumptions, methods, and concerns do not constitute common ground but similar means to achieve separate ends - and these separate ends are embodied in the very constitution of IR and History respectively.

This insight provides the starting point for the second strategy of dealing with the divide between History and IR by reconceptualizing the fields themselves. Given that historians themselves have begun to fundamentally question the meaning of 'history' (Vaughan-Williams, 2005, p. 117), that 'history cannot escape its own process' and will 'therefore always be rewritten' (Isacoff, 2002, p. 608), that there is 'no international "history", only "histories"' (Reus-Smit, 2008, p. 401), IR scholars set out to develop alternative conceptions of history. Following Derrida, Vaughan-Williams argues that instead of importing history, IR should import the problem of history - thus making 'the undecidable infinity of possible truths' its object of analysis (2005, pp. 134, 136, 129). Inspired by Dewey, Isacoff conceives history as an intersubjectively shared or settled understanding of the world that offers the opportunity for acting within it (Isacoff, 2002, pp. 608, 616).

Essentially, these approaches accept the 'problem of history' as constitutive - and thus turn it into a theoretical issue, into a question of adjudication between competing truth claims. While the Derridean approach accepts their undecidability, for the Deweyan approach 'democratic processes' or the 'consensus of community' are decisive (Isacoff, 2002, pp. 605, 620), and constructivists follow Skinner in lowering the criteria for truth claims from infallibility to plausibility (Reus-Smit, 2008, p. 405). Yet, such 'theories' themselves continue to rely on 'historical' claims and narratives which, in the absence of independent criteria, gain a 'solidity' that contradicts claims of more or less radical contingency (Smith, 1999, p. 171; Isacoff, 2002, p. 619). Moreover, toning down the truth claims of historical narratives fundamentally affects their role in the construction of theory - and thus requires a redefinition of theory itself (see also Lawson, 2012, p. 216). Hence, Smith calls for a more supple and less monolithic

conception of theory in accordance with its ancient Greek meaning of contemplation and speculation outside of fixed forms of thought (Smith, 1999, pp. 183-4).

These attempts to reconceptualize history show, first, that history and theory are indeed constituted in relation to each other. Redefining one of these concepts necessarily impacts on the definition of the other. Second, attempts at redefining history and/or theory have themselves a long history. Debates about the nature and meaning of history are part and parcel of the discipline's development just as debates on what constitutes theory are an integral part of the history of other disciplines like IR. Yet while such debates are productive of a variety of conceptions of history and/or theory and do inspire fruitful work, none of these alternatives has generated a body of work that satisfactorily addresses the 'problem of history'. The dynamic of disciplinary divisions produces 'an illusion of progress from a reality of tradition': Marx, Freud, Weber, Durkheim and others 'erected a vision of the social world that has not changed in any foundational sense since their time' (Abbott, 2001, pp. 147, 152, 26-7). This suggests that conceptions of history and theory are themselves historically grounded and require a particular historical context to flourish. It highlights that 'once upon a time' the struggle between time and structure did not exist (Walker, 1989, pp. 168, 169).

The analysis of these attempts to address the gap between theory and history, in sum, shows that neither strategy satisfactorily conceptualizes the space in which the separation occurs. This space, as the attempt to build on commonalities shows, needs to be located outside the individual disciplines. And its logic, as projects of reconceptualization show, must be relational. Finally, this analysis suggest that the space of separation is itself historical. What is missing from these strategies to overcome the history/theory divide, in short, is its theorization and its historicization.

Theorizing the history/theory divide

Projects to overcome disciplinary divides tend to reproduce fragmentation. In oder to explain this contradictory dynamic, this section provides a theoretical account of the fragmentation of modern knowledge in general and the divide between history and (international) theory in particular. To this end, I will follow Foucault's archeological approach because it addresses the three requirements identified above: it identifies a

common epistemic ground for different fields of knowledge, analyses its logical dynamic, and locates it within a historical context.[3] The modern episteme, I will show, generates the fragmentary dynamics of modern knowledge in general and the history/theory divide in particular.

Foucault argues that all substantive knowledge rests on a deeper layer, the episteme, which describes a particular way of 'ordering things', a 'structure of thought', that is 'common to all branches of knowledge' and that 'men in a particular period cannot escape' (1972, p. 191; 1970, p. xxi). This assumption explicitly addresses the three dimensions found wanting in existing strategies to bridge the gap between history and theory: the common foundations of different disciplines, their relational logic, and historical specificity.

Foucault describes three concrete epistemes: the first underpinned Renaissance knowledge in the 16th century (Foucault, 1970, pp. 30-34); the second, the classical episteme or 'science of order', reigned from the 17th century and Locke to the Englightenment and the Idèologues (Foucault, 1970, pp. 71, 329, 346); and the third emerges at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century and constitutes the modern sciences (Foucault, 1970, pp. 346, 220-1).[4]

In order to highlight the implications of the shift to the modern episteme, I will begin with a brief description of its predecessor - the classical episteme. Under the classical episteme, knowledge was produced by positing an abstract philosophical principle - often in the form of the state of nature[5] - which was then used to mechanically link different elements together into a composite whole, leading to a rational account of

[3] Alternative approaches tend to cover one or two but not all three of these requirements. Comparative and philosophical approaches, as the previous section shows, fail to provide an account of the common foundations of modern disciplines and their relations to each other respectively. Sociological and historical analyses, meanwhile, identify common foundations of modern knowledge in the historical context but fail to account for the relations between different disciplines. For a comparison between the sociology, history, and philosophy of knowledge on the one hand and the archeology of knowledge on the other, see Foucault (1972, pp. 192, 206).

[4] The modern sciences here refer to the establishment of modern academic disciplines and not to the scientific revolution that is widely associated with substantive developments particularly in the 'natural sciences' starting in the 16th century with Copernicus.

[5] For these conceptions of the state of nature, the 'discovery' of America and its indigenous population played an important role. But that 'man' was under the classical episteme still an integral part of a cosmology. Only under the modern episteme did 'man' become an individual governed by its own internal nature.

creation and its laws (Foucault, 1970, p. 346). In light of the fact that reality often deviated considerably from such rational orders, Enlightenment histories were designed to provide an historical explanation for these deviations and advocated a return to the proper laws (for a concrete example, see Jahn, 2013, pp. 41-53). This classical way of 'ordering things', however, gave way to the modern episteme at the turn of the 19th century. Instead of deriving a composite whole from universal philosophical principles, the modern episteme endowes individual phenomena with their own internal nature. Now, knowledge is concerned with 'the interior time of an organic structure which grows in accordance with its own necessity and develops in accordance with autochthonous laws' (Foucault, 1970, pp. 226, 265). Yet, by endowing individual phenomena with their own internal nature, the modern episteme severs the relations between these elements - they are not any longer part of the same space, subject to the same pressures, operating according to the same laws - and thus constitutes 'new sciences and techniques with unprecedented objects' (Foucault, 1970, pp. 253, 226; Ross, 2008, p. 205). Where classical histories had been concerned with establishing the relations between different phenomena leading to universal laws governing humanity, the modern discipline of History explores the internal development of individual actors (Woolf, 2011, p. 362).

The extent of this rupture is debated amongst historians. While some authors argue that 19th century historians were united by their antipathy to and rejection of Enlightenment rationalism (White, 1973, pp. 38-9), others hold that modern conceptions of history 'flowed directly from' and built on Enlightenment work (Reill, 1975, p. 220). Yet, Foucault's distinction between the epistemic and the substantive levels of knowledge was developed precisely to explain the simultaneity of rupture and continuity. Hence, 19th century historians were deeply invested in history as 'the key to unlock the meaning of life' and as a 'necessary prologue to meaningful reform' (Reill, 1975, p. 214; see also Iggers, 1986). But they also held that 'the concept of progress and its accompanying optimism has *not yet* been provided with adequate cognitive justification' (White, 1973, p. 47). Modern historians, in other words, pursued the same goals as their Enlightenment predecessors - but in radically different ways. And these, I will show now, embody and reflect the dynamics of the modern episteme.

Modern historians departed from the universal time governing individual phenomena in Enlightenment histories. Instead, they located time within individual phenomena. Thus, Herder, for example, held that every nation followed its own organic historical development (White, 1973, pp. 67, 75). Modern history thus moved away from grand theories and speculative world histories, from histories of and for humanity as a whole, and focused on agency and the (heroic) individual, whether in the form of state, society, or culture (Woolf, 2011, pp. 352-4; White, 1973, p. 62; Christian, 2010, pp. 12-3; Smail, 2011, pp. 21-2; Armitage, 2013, p. 17).

This reorientation had profound implications for the treatment of historical evidence. For Enlightenment historians only evidence in line with their philosophical principles was valid and they rejected much - especially local, particular, imaginative - evidence as representing unreason, ignorance, prejudice, superstition. In contrast, such particular evidence was valuable for modern historians exploring the internal processes of particular entities and they believed that by directly looking at empirical evidence they could work out its inner meaning (White, 1973, pp. 51, 52, 64; Woolf, 2011, p. 394). This attitude towards the careful gathering and critical evaluation of empirical evidence - systematically developed by Leopold von Ranke - became one of the core characteristics of modern historiography. Modern histories thus build bigger pictures from the ground up instead of from philosophical principles down (Woolf, 2011, pp. 352-3, 370-1).

Moreover, history that conceives of individual actors - nations, states, cultures, individuals - as developing in accordance with their own internal nature does not view any present either as 'demented coinage of a nobler age' or as 'incomplete anticipation of an age yet to come' (White, 1973, p. 78). While Enlightenment history sat in judgement over people, modern history is characterized by 'empathy' and plays a socializing role (White, 1973, p. 38; Woolf, 2011, p. 394). Hence, the 19th century historical narratives of the nation were used in schools and in the training of civil servants - playing an important role for national integration (Wright, 2008, p. 123; Woolf, 2011, p. 346; Christian, 2010, p. 14).

Despite substantive continuities, therefore, the shift from the classical to the modern episteme gave rise to a new - empirical, particular, organicist, empathetic instead of

speculative, universalist, rationalist, mechanistic and didactic - conception of history. More importantly, however, the epistemic logic underpinning this conception of history accounts for the fragmentation of modern knowledge in general and the theory/history divide in particular. By establishing the internal organic time of singularities, the modern episteme fractured the conception of universal time (White, 1973, pp. 39, 78-9) and with it the essential unity of history and knowledge. This does not imply that tensions between history and theory were not already present in Enlightenment thought. As mentioned above, Enlightenment authors struggled with the disjuncture between their universal 'theories' and historical particularity. The argument is, rather, that the modern episteme responded to this tension by providing the foundations for a radically different conception of theory and history - for a conception of knowledge that builds bridges between fundamentally different phenomena rather than positing universal axioms that deny these differences (Abbott, 2001, p. 5).

First, it led to the substantive fragmentation of the modern discipline of History. By endowing individual phenomena with their own internal time, universal history dissolved into a myriad of histories - with every individual phenomenon requiring its own historical investigation: diplomatic history, political history, institutional history, ecclasiastical history, intellectual history, military history, economic history, legal history, administrative history, art history, colonial history, social history, agricultural history and so on (Revel, 2008, p. 402; Smith, 1999, p. 185; White, 1973, p. 39). This process of fragmentation, moreover, develops dynamically. Narrating the history of a particular nation as the result of its internal development, for example, ignores the role of its external relations which then calls for a new field of study - such as diplomatic history. The modern episteme is thus the source of the problem of 'tunnel history', of a continuous tunnel linking the present to the past in a particular field but 'sealed off from contact with or contamination by anything that was going on in any of the other tunnels' (Hexter cited in Smith, 1999, p. 185; Löwith, 1949, p. 19).[6]

Second, the dissolution of universal time leads to theoretical and methodological fragmentation. When the overarching religious or cosmological context disappears,

[6] The equivalent in theory are 'theoretical silos' (Buzan and Lawson, 2016).

individual historical facts suddenly become meaningless - and thus require the creation of meaning (Löwith, 1949, p. 10). Hence, the middle of the 19th century was characterized by sustained attempts on the part of historians like Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt to systematically develop and apply historical theory. These attempts, however, culminated in a number of 'equally comprehensible and plausible, yet apparently mutually exclusive, conceptions of the same sets of events' and thus led to the crisis of historicism at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (White, 1973, pp. 41, 432; Wright, 2008) - that is, to the recognition that the theoretical ground for choosing an interpretative strategy was lacking. The discipline of History thus developed theoretical and methodological divisions - between romantic, idealist, positivist history, history as science and history as literary masterpiece - already in the 19th century (Woolf, 2011, pp. 377-8; White, 1973, p. 39). This theoretical fragmentation continues to haunt the discipline of History ever since and underpins the frequently recurring debates amongst historians (Vaughan-Williams, 2005, pp. 133-4; see also Smail, 2011, p. 35).

Third, this dissolution of Theory into theories and the integration of the latter into particular historical narratives constitutes the modern separation of history and theory in general - and its institutionalization in the fragmentation of the modern sciences. Having abandoned the concept of universal time, historians were unable to fulfill their desire to pull the disparate histories together. They provided historical material, individual 'historical facts', that could only be drawn together and made sense of by the application of theory - that is, by abstracting from their concrete and particular individual nature and linking them, across time and space, to similar entities. It was thus no accident that the grand theories of the time tended to be produced by non-historians like Hegel, Comte, Marx (Woolf, 2011, pp. 354, 379). History, in other words, developed into a master discipline that provided historical material, 'historical facts', to other disciplines and fields of knowledge from literary fiction, the collection and display of nature, to comparative philology, sociology, economics, anthropology, IR and, in turn, borrowed theoretical concepts from them (Revel, 2008, pp. 403, 397-8; Woolf, 2011, p. 378). These other disciplines, meanwhile, filled the gap that History had left behind: they set out to link the disparate 'historical facts' - they supplied theory.

The development, and fragmentation, of the modern sciences at large follows precisely this logic. The modern, or internal, conceptualization of economy, for example, excluded its political dimension which led to the development of a discipline of Political Science whose internal definition, in turn, led to the emergence of International Relations addressing external political relations (Morgan, 2008; Schabas, 2008; Bannister, 2008; Farr, 2008; Long and Schmidt, 2005). And each of these sciences, disciplines, and fields of study is itself - just like the discipline of History - subject to dynamic fragmentation and hence internally divided in terms of issue areas, methods and theoretical approaches (Jahn 2016). The most fundamental of these divides within the modern sciences at large - that between the natural and social sciences - was in fact triggered by historians in the 19th century who argued that nature and history were driven by entirely different internal logics and their analysis hence required fundamentally different tools (Wright, 2008, pp. 117, 119). And it is this division between history and the natural sciences that attempts to revive universal history today aim to overcome (Christian, 2010, p. 24).

The modern episteme thus provides the common ground for the modern sciences in general and for History and International Relations in particular. Key to understanding the failure of attempts to overcome this history/theory division, however, is the fact that the modern episteme constitutes them *in relation to each other*. The modern understanding of theory as explaining the dynamics of interaction between different phenomena - states, markets, social groups, cultures, genders, individuals - presupposes the prior establishment of these entities as particular units with their own internal nature and history. The very possibility of IR and its pursuit of nomothetic theories, in other words, is dependent on the ideographic conception of history which produces the gaps that nomothetic theories must fill (Woolf, 2011, p. 387). This is why even scholars interested in closer cooperation between History and IR ultimately come to the conclusion that the separation between these disciplines is 'essential' (Bennett and George, 2001, pp. 165-6). Neither the modern conception of history nor that of (international) theory could exist without their separation.

More generally, it is the recognition that modern knowledge is always only 'partial' knowledge (Foucault, 1970, p. 373) that leads to the almost ubiquitous pursuit of interdisciplinarity. Yet, because modern knowledge cannot help but establish the

internal coherence of such new fields, interdisciplinarity ironically contributes to the dynamic reproduction of fragmentation (Ross, 2008, pp. 227, 235; Foucault, 1970, pp. 357-8; Abbott, 2001, p. 147). It manages to overcome existing boundaries only by erecting new ones around the internal coherence of newly integrated fields. This theorization of the history/theory divide thus explains not only the failure of bridge-building attempts; it also explains why such projects themselves become a source of fragmentation.

Historicizing the history/theory divide

The failure of alternative conceptions of these fields to gain historical traction, meanwhile, requires a historicization of this divide. The modern episteme and hence modern social and political thought, I will suggest, arises in response to a crisis of imperial rather than international politics. Epistemic foundations of knowledge are therefore historically constituted and cannot be changed at will. The imperial nature of their historical origins nevertheless highlights the 'imperialist' function of the modern notion of international relations - and lays it open to critique.

Foucault himself was not interested in exploring the link between the historical context and the emergence of the modern episteme but focused instead on the analysis of the type of knowledge to which it gave rise. Nevertheless, he held that particular historical events may provide 'a determined set of circumstances' or 'precise questions' that shape the development of knowledge (1970, p. 345). He also located the emergence of the modern episteme at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century and went so far as to provide exact dates for the outer limits of this process: 1775-1825 (1970, pp. 221; 233-4).[7] In line with other scholars, he thus placed the emergence of the modern episteme squarely in 'the age of revolution' (Löwith, 1949, pp. 193-4; Wright, 2008, p. 113; Hobsbawm, 1962, pp. 336-58; Armitage, 2013, p. 37).

The age of revolution was conventionally associated with the American, French, Industrial and (much more rarely) Haitian Revolutions. These revolutions were

[7] See Michon (2002) for a general discussion of time in Foucault's work.

interpreted as the result of domestic developments in (mostly) European or Western societies that gave birth to the modern nation state and modern conceptions of politics which subsequently spread across the globe (Palmer, 1959; Hobsbawm, 1962). This narrative is now highly contested and debates range from the 'chronological definition of the Age of Revolutions' through its causes and consequences, to its meaning and scope (Armitage and Subrahmanyam, 2010, p. xviii). The conventional conception is accused of being 'strikingly Eurotropic, if not quite Eurocentric' (Armitage and Subrahmanyam, 2010, p. xxx; Hunt, 2010) and revisions highlight global rather than domestic causes, the continuity of empire rather than the establishment of nation states (see Mulich, 2016a, in this volume), the diversity of influences and comparative developments in the non-European world (Armitage and Subrahmanyam, 2010, pp. xix, xxxi-xxxii). Though following this revisionist literature, I will nevertheless focus on European actors since this is the geographical context in which the modern sciences were institutionalized.

At a first glance it appears as if international politics played a crucial role for the development of modern social and political thought. There is widespread agreement now that the 18th century saw the first 'world wars' and was more generally charaterized by a 'world crisis' or 'world conflict' (Armitage and Subrahmanyam, 2010, pp. xiv, xxiii; Bayly, 1989, pp. 164, 95; 2010, p. 216). These 'world' crises and wars, I want to suggest however, cannot be equated with 'international' politics. The polities that populated Europe during the 18th century (and many other parts of the world as well) were empires and the nature of imperial politics defies the modern distinction between domestic and international politics. Hence, scholars regularly apply terms like 'global', 'cosmopolitan', 'transboundary' (Armitage, 2013, pp. 33-45), 'transnational' (Bayly, 2010, p. 216) to the politics of that time.

Empires can be defined as large and expansionist political units that incorporate, 'usually coercively', a variety of different populations and govern these groups differently (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 8; Go, 2011, pp. 6-7). Consequently, empires are 'politically fragmented, legally differentiated, and encased in irregular, porous, and sometimes undefined borders' with 'areas of partial or shared sovereignty within larger spheres of influence or rule' (Benton, 2010, p. 2). Modern nation states, in contrast, are based 'on the idea of a single people in a single territory constituting

itself as a unique political community' (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 8). Politics in an imperial age is thus characterized by internal diversity, fuzzy borders, and fluid and expansive policies while politics in the age of nation states is characterized by internal homogeneity (ideally, if not in practice), external diversity, and a clear inside/outside distinction (Walker, 1993). The latter gives rise to two different types of politics - domestic and international - neither of which, I will argue first, did exist during the 18th century.

From the 16th to the 18th century, European powers extended their rule dramatically across space - to America, Africa and Asia, as well as over territories and populations within Europe. During the 18th century, hence, all the major actors in Europe were empires. These empires included enclave trading colonies, plantation colonies, settlement colonies in addition to older conquests within Europe. The British Empire, for example, entailed Scotland, Ireland, Wales, settler colonies in North America, plantation colonies in the Caribbean, trading posts in India. These entities were home to a wide variety of people and peoples: indigenous peoples, slaves, English-speaking creoles, trading corporations, land speculators, peasant farmers, virtually self-governing settlers, local elites (Bayly, 1989, p. 76). Each of these groups, moreover, was subjected to a different type of rule. While the Scottish elite was represented in parliament, the Irish was not (Bayly, 1989, p. 88); while the English were taxed highly and subject to close control by the government, the settlers in the American colonies paid very little taxes and enjoyed considerable political autonomy (McFarlane, 1994, p. 254); while slaves in the sugar islands had no rights, their white masters made their voices heard in Parliament (Bayly, 1989, p. 80); and while the North American colonies were ruled by governors, the East India Company relied on indigenous rulers (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, pp. 242-3). Indeed, delegated legal authority - carried by 'ship captains, leaders of reconnaissance voyages, trading companies, municipalities, colonial governors or viceroys, and garrison commanders' - and the resulting 'layered sovereignties' were a defining feature of empire (Benton, 2010, p. 31).

This diverse internal make-up of empires made anything resembling domestic politics impossible. While British common law was restricted to England, the legal authority of the King and English subjecthood were projected to other areas of the empire.

Similarly, the Spaniards limited ecclesiastical authority and developed new institutions for (American) Indian subjects. Generally, 'anomalous legal zones were so common that they came to be regarded as integral and expected elements of empire' (Benton, 2010, pp. 29-30). Conversely, the principle of 'occupation' that is now regarded as a major feature of international law was not employed in the context of equal relations between sovereign states but between dominant and dependent parts of the globe (Fitzmaurice, 2014, p. 16).

The diverse internal make-up of empires also implied fuzzy borders. When, after the Seven Years War, Britain took over the French colonies in North America, for example, it guaranteed the laws, customs, legal systems and religious life of the Quebecois. This fed the suspicions of the original British settlers that the Western lands were to be settled with Catholics and ruled despotically (McFarlane, 1994, pp. 253, 259). Moreover, having lost their French allies, indigenous tribes were suddenly confronted with the expansionist interests of British settlers. In order to reduce friction, Britain established the Proclamation Line that was supposed to keep these groups apart. Maintaining such a boundary, however, proved impossible. The line was 'difficult to locate and impossible to police' (Benton, 2010, p. 14); both parties lived on both sides of the line and it fed the resentment of the settlers against the government (McFarlane, 1994, pp. 253-4). In other cases, relatively clearly defined boundaries did not prevent local actors from cooperating with each other. In the Leeward Islands white planters from islands belonging to different empires established security cooperation across borders in the face of slave revolts (Mulich, 2016b; Benton, 2010, p. 37). And in yet other cases control in border regions constantly shifted from one power to the other (Benton, 2010, p. 37). Such fluid boundaries made it difficult to determine what was inside and what outside.

Moreover, these examples show that the expansionist policies of empires were driven by a variety of actors like trading companies, planters, settlers and governments (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 170; Benton, 2010, p. 3), by private agents seeking 'wealth, virtue or religious redemption' (Darwin, 2009, p. 3) and not by a clearly defined foreign policy of the metropole. The different interests within these empires created powerful pressures for expansion and hence for geopolitical competition within and outside Europe (Bayly, 1989, p. 95). Already at the beginning of the 18th

century, Britain participated in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13) partly because a rising influence of France in the Americas would have threatened the strategic security of its North American colonies (McFarlane, 1994, p. 220). With the boundaries between British and French colonies in North America unsettled, the need to protect British settlers from impending French expansion also led to the participation of Britain in the Seven Years War (1756-1763). White planters on the sugar islands were completely dependent on imperial protection in the face of potential slave revolts, Spanish and French competition, and for the supply of basic necessities that were not produced in plantation economies (McFarlane, 1994, p. 261; Bayly, 1989, pp. 91-2). Irish dairy and pastoral products were excluded from the English market in order to protect English farmers and hence particularly dependent on export to the colonies (Bayly, 1989, p. 87). Similarly, poor Scots emigrated in large numbers to the overseas colonies, joined the East India Company, and the military that fought the Seven Years War and the War of American Independence (Bayly, 1989, p. 86). Conversely, the collapse of the South Sea Company produced a serious political crisis in London and thus ensured that the government subsequently guaranteed, however grudgingly, British interests abroad (Bayly, 1989, p. 80).

The fact that these empires were made up of a ragtag of different populations, forms of rule, and fuzzy borders thus led not only to expansionist pressures, it also turned interimperial rivalries into 'world wars' fought out in all corners of the globe. Already the War of the Spanish Succession at the beginning of the 18th century was fought not just in Europe but also in North and South America. Theaters of the Seven Years War - by some accounts 'rightly seen as the first truly transnational war in history' (Bayly, 2010, p. 216) - could be found in Europe, North America, Central America, West Africa, India, and the Philippines (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 220). Even the War of American Independence was not just fought between the settlers and the British government but included Spain and France. And yet, these wars were not 'international' in the sense of pitching clearly defined domestic or national interests represented by imperial governments against each other. They were driven, instead, by a conglomerate of reasons ranging from dynastic competition through private economic interests to local conflicts and intraimperial tensions.

The cost of these 'world wars', however, played a crucial role in bringing about the upheavals of the age of revolutions. Not only, as Kant noted, did imperial policies furnish soldiers for wars in Europe but their financing through debt seriously harmed the population (1957, p. 23, 6). Generally, imperial governments tried to cover the cost of these wars by increasing taxation - and this led to widespread resistance (Fitzmaurice, 2014, p. 5; Bayly, 2004, p. 86; Darwin, 2009, p. 18). France's attempt to raise additional revenue ultimately led to the Franco-Haitian Revolution (Skocpol and Kestnbaum, 1990, p. 17; Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 220; McFarlane, 1994, p. 302). Britain's repeated attempts to raise taxes in its North American colonies and in India resulted eventually in North American independence (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 220). Spain tightened control over its colonies and thus upset intermediaries and triggered resistance (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 247). While the outcome of these tensions and struggles differed from case to case (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, pp. 247, 225, 227; McFarlane, 1994, pp. 258, 274; Blaufarb, 2007, p. 761), they were consistently triggered by the increase of taxes and central control in order to cover the cost of war.

The crisis that culminated in the age of revolutions at the end of the 18th century thus had its roots in the nature and weaknesses of imperial politics rather than in international or domestic politics. 'National' identity or 'democratic' aspirations were not the source of the crisis but rather its product. There was no clearly articulated American nationalism in the British colonies before 1765 and it was only in the context of resistance against the British that poorer men began to join the committees and transformed American political life (McFarlane, 1994, pp. 274, 272, 258). Similarly, in France the Jacobin clubs initially mobilized the propertied and educated elites and only later, in the context of war, began to serve as recruitment agencies for national administrative and military efforts and hence wider participation (Skocpol and Kestnbaum, 1990, pp. 19-20). And the slaves of St Domingue, too, were initially not fighting for 'national' independence but rather for freedom within the empire (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 227).

The outcome of these political struggles was therefore not the constitution of nation states. Instead, it was an uneasy and volatile mixture between new political ideas revolving around freedom and old imperial politics. On the one hand, the age of

revolution gave rise to new forms of thinking about politics, new forms of 'claim-making', new conceptions of the role of the state and the nature of international order, new ideas about popular rights (Bayly, 2010, pp. 212-3; Bayly, 1989, p.100) and led to the fragmentation of empires - particularly in the Americas (Armitage, 2013, pp. 215-6). On the other hand, they generally resulted in a continuation of imperial politics albeit in different constellations. Spain managed to strengthen its control over the American colonies between 1783 and 1796 (McFarlane, 1994, p. 302). The result of the French Revolution was the crowning of Napoleon as emperor and his pursuit of empire building both within and, less successfully, outside Europe. Citizenship rights, moreover, were ultimately neither extended equally to the population of St Domingue nor to the various populations conquered in Europe (McFarlane, 1994, pp. 274, 272). American independence led to an 'empire of liberty' that included slavery and rightless indigenous populations (McFarlane, 1994, p. 281). Upon independence from Portugal, Brazil set itself up as an empire in its own right continuing differential political rule (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, pp. 220-1). Threatened by the military and ideological challenge of the French Revolution and fearful of social upheaval, Britain entered a new phase of imperial expansion (McFarlane, 1994, p. 306). The crisis of empire and fear of domestic revolt led creole elites to line up behind the government (Bayly, 1989, p. 99). Despite the loss of the North American colonies, Britain gained new territories in the Caribbean, strengthened its hold over Canada and hardened its control of India (McFarlane, 1994, p. 285). Indeed, the principle of layered sovereignty so characteristic of empire was confirmed by the Berlin Conference as late as the end of the 19th century (Fitzmaurice, 2014, pp. 28, 7). 19th century politics, in sum, was characterized by the contradictory political principles of freedom and imperialism (Benton, 2010, p. 4; Mulich, 2016a) and the idea of an international order based on nation states was only codified in 1948 in the UN Charter, and largely realized in the 1970s after decolonization (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 183; Armitage, 2013, p. 21).

It was to this tension between freedom and empire and its fragmentary potential that the modern episteme provided a 'solution'. As the second part of the 18th century unfolded, schism and severance, conflict and suffering increased and widened the gap between the universalist structure of thought and the lived experience of people (White, 1973, p. 62). The modern episteme naturalized this fragmentation by

providing different people and peoples with their own internal nature and individual - national - histories. 'Herder's acceptance of every totality as inherently possessing its own rule of articulation could be extended to a contemporary society, as well as to past social orders, in a spirit acceptable to both the Conservative and Liberal ranges of the sprectrum of political ideology' (White, 1973, p. 78; see also Bayly, 2010, p. 212). Consequently, tensions between these groups did not appear any longer as the result of a disfunctional political order but as rooted in their diverse natures and developmental differentials. The national histories of the 19th century thus played a crucial role in ameliorating the social and political tensions of the revolutionary era; and they were indeed used - in education and the training of civil servants (Wright, 2008, p. 123; Woolf, 2011, p. 346; Christian, 2010, p. 14) - as guiding principles for the establishment of national unity in the crisis ridden and fragmented societies emerging from the age of revolution.

This invention of the modern concept of the nation as a political community with its own internal nature and independent history, moreover, simultaneously implied the existence of an international sphere in which these independent nations interacted with each other. The concept of sovereignty developed by 19th century lawyers encapsulated and codified precisely this freedom and independence of individual nations from others and provided the basis for the modern conception of international relations as the interaction of free and formally equal 'like units'. Hence, it was no accident that the term 'international' was first used by Bentham in the 1780s with reference to the legal relations between independent communities (Armitage, 2013, pp. 42, 70).

These concepts completely obscured, however, that historically these sovereign nation-states-in-the-making had not developed independently from each other but were constituted by and through the messy and hierarchical relations within and between empires of which most of them were still a part. And it was precisely by hiding these constitutive relations between individual communities that the modern episteme facilitated the continuation of empire. It allowed 19th century international lawyers, political theorists, and practicioners to present the right to freedom - sovereignty - as a natural property of the internal characteristics of a nation. By the same token, however, the denial of sovereignty to other communities was not

depicted as the result of power politics but rather as the natural consequence of (lacking) internal - cultural, religious, racial, or political - achievements. As John Stuart Mill famously argued, barbarians had no rights as a nation (Mill, 1984, p. 119). 19th century international law is, in fact, characterized by the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to elaborate objective criteria for the recognition or denial of sovereignty rights based on the internal characteristics of particular communities (Anghie, 2007). The modern episteme thus allowed political actors to endorse the universal principle of freedom even while they engaged in imperialist power politics.

Similarly, the 19th century imperialism of free trade, combining freedom and oppression, was made possible by this internalist conception of politics and economics and their separation. Imperialism of free trade entails the use of economic means to establish, maintain, and expand political inequality and informal empire within the international system (Gallagher and Robinson, 1953). Yet, such practices were not considered 'imperialism' because they simply followed the generally valid internal logic of economics - free trade; just as the resultant hierarchies were not 'imperialism' because they did not entail formal political rule of the dominant over the dependent community. In contrast to the 18th century empires in which politics and economics were intimately linked and the metropole was forced to deal with the political consequences of its economic policies (such as revolutions as a result of increasing taxes), the empire of free trade could distance itself from the political fall-out of its economic policies (such as the destruction of indigenous industries) and leave this responsibility to formally independent indigenous governments. It thus facilitated the continuation of imperialism not just ideologically but materially.

Finally, as Robert Vitalis has recently shown (2015), even the establishment of the discipline of International Relations in the United States was driven to a considerable extent by the desire to defend, maintain, and expand the dominance of the white over other races (see also Bell, 2014). Yet, these roots of the discipline have remained hidden for almost a century behind the modern conception of international relations as relations between sovereign states - and hence divorced from anxieties about race that crossed the domestic/international divide and concerned 'natural' properties of different groups rather than 'relations' between them.

The modern episteme, in sum, structures thought by providing individual phenomena with an independent nature and thus separating them from others. This structure underpins the modern political concepts - nation, international, sovereignty, politics, economics etc. - that came to play a crucial role in facilitating the continuation of imperialism during the 19th century. It provides three crucial political functions: it naturalizes and thus depoliticizes fragmentation - including social and political tensions; it provides the guiding principles for internal integration - including national integration; and it hides the constitutive role of relations between different entities and thus accommodates contradictory principles - including those of the domestic and international, economics and politics, power and freedom, sovereignty and imperialism.

Conclusion

This Special Issue explores the possibilities of bridging the gap between theory, history and the international with a view to producing better integrated and hence also politically more useful knowledge. Since previous attempts to address the fragmentation of modern knowledge have remained unsuccessful, this paper has taken a step back from these bridging projects and provided a theorization and historicization of the fragmentation of modern knowledge in general and the history/theory divide in particular.

It shows that this fragmentation has its roots in the modern episteme that endowes individual phenomena with their own internal nature and thus severs their relations to each other. This structure underlying modern thought constitutes particular historical 'facts' that then require 'theories' to link them with each other and provide them with meaning. Overcoming these fragmentary dynamics would thus require new epistemic foundations of knowledge. Yet, epistemic change, I have argued, is triggered by specific historical circumstances - in this case a 'crisis of empire' (McFarlane, 1994, p. 252) in the 18th century. New conceptions of history or theory thus fail to gain traction, I suggest, because they lack the requisite historical foundations that could sustain them.

Yet, tracing the origins of modern social and political thought does not just identify the historical nature of epistemic change. In addition, it challenges a widely shared

assumption that also motivates this particular project: the idea that identifying the historical nature of particular institutions allows us to change them, that anything that is the result of human practices can be unmade - purposely destroyed, altered, neglected, forgotten or radically reconstructed - by human practices (Sewell, 2005, p. 10; see also White, 1973, p. 434).

The modern episteme that underpins the fragmentation of modern knowledge certainly is the result of human practices - specifically, I have argued, of the crisis of empire in the 18th century. Yet, while recovering this history shows that things could have been different and thus allows us to discover our agency, it 'does not provide us with a warrant to engage in fantasies of omnipotence' (Kratochwil, 2006, p. 8). The crisis was the result of the conjunctural and unintended consequences of a myriad of individual events and practices spread across the entire globe. It was a *general* crisis giving rise to a *general* structure of knowledge beyond the reach of any particular purposeful human agency. Indeed, the very conception of politics that holds that human beings 'can, in principle, master all things by calculation' (Weber, 1948, p. 139) is itself the product of the modern episteme, of the fragmentation of knowledge into a myriad of 'things'.

More constructively, the search for the roots of modern social and political thought draws attention to the fact that its architecture 'is inherently disposed towards empire or inherently disposed towards Western interests and values'; it unveils the 'liberal myth ... that the instruments of political thought are objective or neutral standards' (Fitzmaurice, 2014, pp. 11-2). It shows that modern social and political thought provided a 'solution' to the 18th century crisis of empire by accommodating both freedom and imperialism. And it draws attention to the fact that the very same function still operates today. Just as in the 19th century, the denial of sovereignty rights through sanctions and interventions is depicted as the natural result of the internal shortcomings of particular societies: their failure to protect human rights, their lack of good government; and free trade policies are imposed on weaker economies with reference to the nature of economics. Missing from these accounts are the power relations between the different parties. And it is these power relations embedded in and hidden by modern social and political thought that the search for its international origins brings to light and lays open to critique.

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